

Jaidyn Carter

The thin white-linen cloth feathers, just listen to the ground.

Snellville was an unapologetically quiet town. Residents of the area usually said that “most people were out of it, before they realized they were in it.” Well I suppose if that’s the case, that explains why there were so few secular homes compared to the rapid structuring of model, good American subdivisions. The past of this little place in the ‘Ville called The Promised Land, had been long subdivided as well. But that was no concern of the folk that lived in the single-stories and the ones who worked in the El Taqueria market, and slept under the market now. I used to wonder how they managed to remain so carefree in any situation, even when the store was ransacked and shut down when it was first owned by an older black gentleman who’d since moved it away. According to the gentleman’s last conversation with my grandfather, he’d put his bet on the idea that there were some “not-so happy spirits here”.

What were spirits? Can they see me?

All the rather normal questions to be expected of a five-year old boy in his light-up Bumblebee sneakers. I used to think if I ran fast enough maybe I could outrun their sight, silent eyes- a kind of omniscient viewer that made me believe in fantasy.

In the afternoons after I jumped off of bus 32, my mother would stand upon the sienna bricks holding the screen-door open, strawberry marmalade in one hand. I would rush to her arms in blue Adidas this time (because I loved Sonic), making sure to not let the mosquitoes accompany me inside.

Inside the 1008 ft sienna-colored brick home awaited my grandmother in the living room seated by the window, watching alongside my mother waiting for my arrival home. As the door sheared near fully-closed, her glasses would shimmer in a way that was always reminiscent of something like Sebastian Michealis from the Black Butler anime series we would watch. Down the hall was my grandfather, who would often sit mixing his daily diabetic rush of nutty-butter wafers with an ice cream crushed up together. He'd yell to the door "Spoot! Come watch the ball game with me!" In a house like this, how could I consider the worries of the world outside of 4451?

Inside the sienna-brick walls that were laid together closely like cousins in a pallet, those people didn't matter.

Little me couldn't begin to fathom the thought of saying "what would they think?"

Who were they anyway?

Sometimes when me and my grandmother would sit together, she would tell me about the nasty things the girls in dark, woolen-cloth blouses would shout from the bus as it trollied on; as if it didn't hear the young-boys running alongside.

"Aye!" they yelled.

"Aye!" I yelled as well, but this time to the 'make-believe, but all too real' spirits in the walls of 4451 Lee Road.

However, I could never feel disdain towards those people outside of 4451 and well into Buckhead now where they built the nicer houses next to the abandoned ones. Not then, because my best friend at the time was white, and not now because all the feelings of disdain had left a purplish- stain of embarrassment upon my heart. There was something in the gaze, it looked as if

it wanted to apologize for something, but a contagious infection, and whooping cough would not permit such. The sly-grins were already unsettling, but the stares that you could feel walking by their houses or even at the grocery store just said “danger” (Hooks, 1990, pg. 41). I believe this is why those sienna-bricks felt so liberating. I could resist the stares, the odd comments from teachers in primary about my hairstyles. I could stand on my porch in my light-up sneakers and resist!

The little town of the “promised land” wasn’t too far off from Highway 124 South. An Irish man by the name of Mr. Thomas McGuire often drove through the little town with his family. They would stop and watch the residents as they milled, the residents were simple people.

Not because they were uncomprehending- rather they may have understood too much. About this town, about the south, about that highway that ran almost straight through the tiny black town.

It’s safe to say McGuire admired the ethic of the males, who came home from their daily maintenance of the corn pastures and surrounding province right beyond that 124. Often you could hear the women and the melody of a somber song through those same sienna bricks. They would beat the yellow from the maize, ripping the stem and leaf from top to bottom; never vice versa. The mixing bowl would soon emit a sweet scintillating butter-churn yellow, it made perfect for cream of corn.

Mr. Thomas began to visit the town so much that he decided to build a large, white upon a hill in the town.

Right above the small single family homes, the corn pastures, and the women beating yellow to an eminent light.

Why, Mr. McGuire *loved* the town's inhabitants, and frankly, they were not opposed to him either. Evidently so, they renounced their civil duties, becoming his indentured statutes of servitude. They were even allowed a Christian burial at death, and allowed holiday-leave.

Historical articles from the Snellville Historical Society tells us that the people of the promised land were treated 'decently and firmly' as McGuire grew his ownership with the funds he'd brought from Ireland. One in 1830, twelve in 1840, twenty-three in 1850, ten more the next ten years.

By 1864, a black soot smoke would create mini-halos around the fields in the Promised Land. Residents from fields Lee, Roundabout, Orchard and School House could hear the bellow cries twenty minutes east of Metro Atlanta (Du Bois, 1903, pg. 14). It wasn't long before Yankee and Confederate soldiers stockpiled the goods of the plantation and the bodies of the people who had negligently entrusted shimmers on the Big House. After the invasion of Sherman's troop, Mr. McGuire was left with close to nothing, but the big, white, all-alluring house. As an attempt to save the remnants of the once green pastures of the Promised Land, underlain by the rich-soil in which coined the name 'Promised Land'. McGuire sold nearly all of his stock, including 80 bushes of corn for 800 dollars, 300 dozens of fodder worth 900 dollars, 4 negroes worth 13,000 dollars, and one fine comb and cloth brush totaling to 15 dollars.

The old Irish man who would pass through the small black town aside 124 so often- so often in fact, he decided to claim the land and the inhabitants passed away later in the following years. The Livsey's were light-skinned mulatto people, that had later adopted the 110 acre land of the promised, the men who came home in their pullovers; and the women that danced to that same somber song as they beat the yellow.

They were self-respecting folks, so they didn't see the surrounding foliage as the hiding spots of the slaves and McGuire's children during the invasion. They saw beautiful greens, with rosy accents from arrangements of azaleas, and cherokee roses peeking from outside the bushes grandma said not to play too close to. They saw potential under the soot-tough enough to be turf, atop that rich, rich soil.

Tom, Thomas Livsey and Dorethia Livsey were Chicagoan black folk. Thomas had shared stories with me about his adoration Big White House and Mr. McGuire over peach-cobbler in styrofoam containers his daughter had made. I didn't understand the sentiment and I thought the veil may've been different for them (Du Bois 6).

I thought to myself that it certainly didn't resemble that of my great-grandfather's veil, he seemed to be unfazed by those stains of disdain towards the people. The same ones who wouldn't stop the bus for my grandmother, the same ones who couldn't give me my damn face back in public.

I had only known him from pictures in the hallways and photo books with blue floral print, only from conversation with my uncle Kenny; who often told me "You ain't Curry-kin, but that's alright!"

I was never sure what he meant.

He told me the stories about the same candy-red Chevy Caprice I saw in the photos, he told me about a voice of thunder that was enough to awaken a small colony. He told me about the nights spent on the porch holding a shotgun til' sunrise, he told me about the white devils too; but he never got too far before laughing a belly laugh.

The contagious kind.

Whenever I felt too far from those sienna-bricks, I tried to imagine myself with the voice of Shango, my same hands stringing mortar before placing those bricks.

I rarely imagined myself with the shotgun, although I kept that photo in my wallet. That was my antidote for those odd-feelings of imminent danger when I searched for fish in the market.

The only reason I hadn't holstered a weapon, I was unsure of. Perhaps I didn't want the veil my great-grandfather had, or maybe I had just been at the whims of the universe. I admired the way uncle Kenny spoke of his veil though, it was the kind of reckless-abandonment for self, but tender preservation for family that froze you in place. It made you question your own liberation, and at what cost would you pay for those you love? It was a powerful veil that assured you that nothing else mattered outside of 4451 and it relayed the same message to onlookers as they passed the brown little house perched upon the hill.

For the longest time I attempted to not develop a veil of any kind, that may have been the mistake. Trying. I teetered between trying to decipher their looks, and ignoring it all together. My thoughts remained just that, mine. My face did too, but everytime Kenny got locked, or somebody passed in a hasty manner that didn't allow for proper grievance. The image began to smear again, and again.

Everyday, as I passed the big white house, the morning announcements followed by a pledge to a delicate piece of cloth would all taunt me, taunt the photograph in my pocket, taunt the young boy who once felt so brave as to shout at the once rich, rich soil. The sly grins began to reappear in the form of the morning news, followed by sentiments of the victims' families (God bless their souls), followed by the forecast for showers over the next few nights.

It was a beautiful day when we got the news though, an resoundingly solemn blue sky, scattered cumulonimbus and wisp clouds found their mates over cable lines. Almost in a double-dutch manner, the clouds skipped between the seams of the sunray beams shining directly into my eyes, through the nape of my neck and into the alocasia plants. I couldn't care to see anymore, it sounds strange but it was the most peaceful thing I could imagine. So I stared, and I stared. I stared only until my ears unmuddled from the ringing and I could only hear faint weeps now. It was a relief to know I'd missed most of it, because men only cried when other people cried. The dew was fresh in the meadow clippings, but for some reason every part of my being was exhausted. It felt like years walking into my room that morning, my limbs didn't feel as though they were mine. I was shaking, steadily as if everything had pressurized, yet I was so heavy.

So, so heavy.

My heart had turned puddy, with my arms lopping over one another like a yarn scarf. The stitches were ripping and I was hoping it would take off my arm in the process, then my leg, and then.

The days weren't secular anymore, there was no time- no need to be anywhere anyway. It wasn't supposed to happen and I knew it, we all knew it. It was only Wednesday when we had spoke and she said "I'll be home", and seemingly day by day. Day, by day.

There was no veil anymore, no need for fancy terms to negate me from the fact that the basis of anthropology and medicine had failed us (Benedict, 1934, pg.

2-3). There was no veil to paint pantone shades of mulatto ‘me and mommy’ teetering between unbridled hatred and burning a hospital.

There were no pretty blue-ink roses and towel-pastel drawings of a black Jesus to pray to for sanctification and virtue. No black-cherubs in the kitchen cabinets, or bowls of water for me to drown into. No Pimp/Priest for me to confess my sadness of our last arguments, or consolidate me for payment.

Only me and a recent call.

I refused to be blinded by either side of the double-consciousness, so I would call out to you. Over, and over, over.

I called out to you again when I couldn’t see myself.

Chirps and whistles followed the stream, and only the little red cardinal remained in my foresight. The little bird always followed, but never too closely. Only close enough to where you could gain a quick glimpse, as the breasts of the bird feathered out before flying straight through the wisp clouds.

This was the aftermath of deafening silence from screaming too loud, too often, I thought to myself. The feeling of bliss shrouded in the depths of good soil, and families who built their homes by the brick.

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